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Chairman: Mr. KHOUINI (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 71: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued) (A/47/293 and 391; A/SPC/47/L.3)

1. Mr. MURTAZA (Pakistan) said that the recent political changes and the new world climate of confidence and willingness to cooperate offered an unparalleled opportunity for devising international measures to deal with the risks of atomic radiation while at the same time promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear technology for the common good.

2. The United States and the Russian Federation had reached a welcome decision to reduce their strategic nuclear warheads; and the temporary moratorium on nuclear testing by the United States, the Russian Federation and France was another encouraging step that would help reduce and eventually eliminate the dangers of atomic radiation. Pakistan was in favour of converting the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty into a comprehensive test ban treaty, by means of preliminary regional agreements that would pave the way.

3. It was the special responsibility of the developed countries to extend assistance without discrimination or selectivity to the developing countries through the transfer of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, such as the creation of much-needed alternative sources of energy, and medical and scientific applications. Equally important was the exchange of safety-related information and technology, including the provision of spare parts for nuclear facilities established through such cooperation. The enhanced role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), stricter controls on the transportation and storage of nuclear materials, and greater international cooperation on safety methods would help significantly to avert nuclear mishaps.

4. Pakistan appreciated the work being done by the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and expected that its findings would eventually be disseminated among the scientific community and the public so as to create greater awareness of the issue.

5. Mr. KONIK (Poland) commended the Scientific Committee for its work which, in the new political environment, had new relevance and could encompass new priorities, like the peaceful uses of atomic energy, the risk of nuclear accidents, medical applications of nuclear energy and the effects of natural radiation. The Scientific Committee was generally recognized as the highest scientific authority conducting research on the risks of radiation to human beings and the environment, and its reports were highly valued because of its impartiality. Its independence had recently been threatened by the suggestion made in General Assembly resolution 46/185 C to consider merging the Scientific Committee with IAEA, a merger on which neither body had been consulted and which neither favoured. The mandates of the two bodies were quite different: IAEA promoted the applications of radiation, while the

(Mr. Konik, Poland)

Scientific Committee evaluated radiation sources, their effects and the risks of exposure. Poland believed that the two bodies should remain separate.

6. At Poland's initiative, the Scientific Committee had begun to evaluate the basic theory underlying the safeguards currently in force that even the smallest doses of atomic radiation could be harmful. Its analysis of the question could determine how radiation risks were perceived and would affect public opinion on the use of nuclear power in many countries. Poland supported draft resolution A/SPC/47/L.3 on the effects of atomic radiation.

7. Mr. BHAGAT (India) said that the exceptionally useful and detailed reports submitted by the Scientific Committee from time to time would help to develop a proper perspective on the sources and effects of radiation, thereby contributing to harnessing the vast peaceful potential of nuclear energy for the benefit of all. His delegation looked forward to the Scientific Committee's conclusion of its ongoing evaluations of radiation sources and exposures and the reviews of biological subjects and its submission of a comprehensive report to the General Assembly at its next session.

8. India was confident that Member States, specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and other national and international scientific bodies would continue to make available to the Scientific Committee information pertinent to its work.

9. The prime objective of India's own atomic energy programme was the development, control and use of atomic energy solely for peaceful purposes, namely, for the generation of electricity and the development of nuclear applications in research, agriculture, industry, medicine and other fields. Accidents at nuclear facilities like Chernobyl were a reminder of the possible consequences of radiation and had underscored the need for research on protection against radiation leakages. Indian scientists had worked closely with the Scientific Committee on the issue of safety standards.

10. His delegation had been pleased to co-sponsor draft resolution A/SPC/47/L.3 on the effects of atomic radiation.

11. Mr. ZVONKO (Belarus) said that in order to ensure the objectivity and reliability of data produced by the Scientific Committee, it would be prudent not to merge that body with IAEA.

12. The Scientific Committee's report (A/47/293) demonstrated that the Committee continued to perform valuable work on technical questions concerning radiation, irradiation and their effects, and deserved recognition for its efforts. Those questions had been of particular relevance to Belarus, whose population continued to experience the lethal effects of radiation released as a result of the Chernobyl disaster. His delegation hoped that the effects of radiation on human beings - particularly children - and the environment would continue to receive careful attention from the Scientific Committee, and that

(Mr. Zvonko, Belarus)

the results of its research would eventually lead to the discovery of the fundamental mechanisms of radiation-induced oncogenesis.

13. The Scientific Committee's research programme for 1993 on radiation sources and irradiation had aroused great interest among Belarusian scientists. He expressed the hope that its conclusions and recommendations would lead to a fuller and more objective understanding in the international community of the complex long-term and large-scale nature of the Chernobyl tragedy; and that such an understanding could be used to develop programmes to mitigate the effects of the disaster.

14. To date, its pernicious health effects had manifested themselves mainly in children. Research had demonstrated that approximately 200,000 Belarusian children had experienced enlarged thyroids, and the number of cases of thyroid cancer had increased by a factor of more than 10. Thyroid function in many children had been compromised, and incidences of leukemia had been rising. According to data from Japanese scientists, the peak for new cases of radiation-induced leukemia was observed six to eight years after irradiation. Therefore, incidences of leukemia in Belarus were just beginning to reach their peak.

15. He said further that Belarus would be happy to share information about its sad experience with the world community. In that connection, his Government suggested that an international centre for the study of thyroid diseases could be established in Belarus under the auspices of WHO, which had had experience in that area. Close cooperation between the Belarusian Government and WHO had already resulted in the establishment of a European centre for stomatology, which was a unique facility for the development of new techniques in biological dosimetry. Those techniques were expected to lead to new approaches to the measurement of doses from internal and external radiation sources - a prospect of considerable interest to Belarus, as current techniques permitted only the measurement of long-lasting radionuclides and not the entire range of radionuclides released immediately after the explosion of the Chernobyl reactor.

16. He concluded by noting that, as at the previous session, Belarus was co-sponsoring the draft resolution on the issue, and hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

17. Mr. YAMAMOTO (Japan) observed that no part of the world was immune from the potentially deadly effects of atomic radiation, and that future generations could not be guaranteed full protection from the danger. The need for international cooperation in that area was indisputable. Convinced of the increasing importance of the work of the Scientific Committee, Japan had again joined in sponsoring the draft resolution under item 71.

18. Several delegations had referred to a matter not specifically on the Committee's agenda, Japan's programme for the surface shipment of enriched plutonium. He drew attention to the following facts. First, enriched

(Mr. Yamamoto, Japan)

plutonium was an essential part of Japan's efforts to diversify its energy needs and thereby develop a sound basis for the livelihood of its people. Secondly, the safety of the vessel to be used for the shipment of the plutonium - one designed for that specific purpose - had been thoroughly tested; the ship had, moreover, been recently modernized and outfitted with the latest safety equipment, and the container far exceeded international safety standards. Japan was confident that the planned shipment posed no threat to the environment. Thirdly, Japan had taken every possible precaution in the selection of routes and the use of monitoring satellites, radar systems and an escort ship, and had devised a contingency plan in case of fire - all measures which again were well above the standards set by the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and by the IAEA guidelines. Fourthly, the shipment would be undertaken strictly in accordance with international law, including the Japan-France bilateral treaty on the matter. Fifthly, aware of the possible concerns of various countries, Japan had made every effort to gain their understanding and had seriously addressed their legitimate concerns. Lastly, it was his Government's obligation to keep certain information regarding navigation routes confidential in order to avoid any risk, an established and recently reaffirmed international practice. Basically, however, the ship would maintain a distance of at least 200 nautical miles from the coastal States and would not make any calls to port.

19. As a nation extremely sensitive to the dangers that nuclear materials might pose to current and future generations, to the environment and to natural resources, Japan was fully prepared, in order to allay any possible concerns, to provide necessary information to the Scientific Committee at the request of the international community.

20. Mr. POSSO (Ecuador) said that his country attached great importance to the work being done by the Scientific Committee to determine safe doses of atomic radiation and assess the effects and risks of radiation, so that the necessary international action could be taken. The Scientific Committee and the United Nations Environment Programme must be natural allies in working to safeguard both human beings and the environment.

21. Ecuador was aware of the growing use of nuclear energy, given the critical scarcity and the misuse of traditional energy sources. There was a corresponding need, however, to guarantee the safe management of nuclear energy, which must of course be used only for peaceful purposes and in support of the overall development of peoples. Although the fear of nuclear annihilation had subsided, the irresponsible use of sources of atomic energy and the continuation of nuclear testing, even for peaceful purposes, were a continuing source of concern. Hence, France's decision to suspend nuclear testing was a positive step that would no doubt encourage others to follow suit, prompted by a new spirit of interdependence and humanitarian concern in a world where isolated events could have global repercussions.

22. Ecuador was prepared to support draft resolution A/SPC/47/L.3.

23. The CHAIRMAN announced that Mongolia had become a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/47/L.3.

24. Draft resolution A/SPC/47/L.3 was adopted without a vote.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.